

What is a drug?

Grade 9

SUGGESTED TIME: 30 MINUTES

OBJECTIVES

- Students will become familiar with the types of drugs and their effects.

ALBERTA LEARNING OUTCOME LINKS

Grade 9 *Health and Life Skills*, Wellness Choices

- Personal Health: W-9.6
Analyze addictions

Grade 9 *English Language Arts*

- General Outcome #3 (Specific outcomes: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4):
Students will listen, speak, read, write, view and represent to manage ideas and information.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

- Handout **Drug classifications** located on page 4 of this resource.
- Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse at www.ccsa.ca

The word drug is often used to refer to illegal street drugs. There are, however, many different kinds of drugs. For example, alcohol, caffeine and nicotine are so often used, they are seldom thought of as drugs. For this reason they are sometimes referred to as “invisible drugs.” Whether the drug is prescription, over-the-counter, legal or illegal, it can be classified according to its effect.

Mood-altering drugs

Uppers

Uppers are stimulants. Stimulants speed up the body processes and the central nervous system (CNS). Stimulants are drugs that are used for a quick, temporary, increase of energy. They increase alertness and endurance, decrease appetite, and produce feelings of well-being and euphoria. Abuse of stimulants can produce severe psychological and physical dependence. Nicotine and caffeine are the two most commonly used stimulants.

Examples: caffeine, nicotine, Ritalin®, cocaine, crack, speed, Dexedrine®, Tenuate®, Ionamin®, ecstasy

- Ecstasy** is a drug sometimes associated with the rave culture. It acts as both an upper or stimulant and a hallucinogen (tending to produce hallucinations). It is most often classified as a hallucinogenic amphetamine. Common desired effects of ecstasy are:

- an enhanced sense of touch,
- feeling of increased self worth to the point of euphoria,
- feelings of empathy with others, increased alertness and increased physical energy.

Some physical effects include:

- rapid heart rate,
- elevated blood pressure,
- excessive pupil dilation,
- tremors, palpitations and sweating,
- increased salivation and
- grinding of teeth and clenching of jaw muscles.

After-effects can include drowsiness, muscle aches and generalized fatigue, depression lasting one to two days, difficulty concentrating, paranoid feelings of persecution, and short-lived anxiety and irritability.

Downers

Downers slow down the body processes and depress the CNS.

- Narcotics** (also referred to as narcotic analgesics) are highly addictive painkilling drugs that may also produce a euphoric sense of well-being.

Examples: opium, codeine, morphine, heroin, methadone, Demerol®, Dilaudid®, Novahistex-DH®, Talwin®, Percodan®

Non-narcotic pain relievers differ from narcotics because they do not depress the CNS or have mind-altering effects. Examples of non-narcotic pain relievers are Tylenol® or Aspirin®. They are not classified as “downers.”

- Tranquillizers** and sleeping pills are also drugs that slow down the CNS. In the past, many sleeping pills belonged to a chemical group called the barbiturates.
 - Barbiturates (e.g. Seconal®, Tuinal®) have been largely replaced by benzodiazepenes. Most tranquillizers and sleeping pills prescribed today belong to the benzodiazepene chemical group.
 - In usual doses tranquillizers (e.g. Valium®, Ativan®, Restoril®) produce a sense of calm well-being and are used to treat anxiety. In larger doses, they will also induce sleep and even unconsciousness. Sleeping pills cause greater depression of the CNS in order to induce and maintain sleep.

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.

- **Alcohol** first depresses centres in the brain that inhibit actions and restrain behaviour, which is the reason some people initially appear livelier after consuming alcohol. Excessive consumption can result in further depression of the CNS so that a person may fail to retain memory of the event (a blackout) or lose consciousness (pass out). Death can occur from an overdose of alcohol.

- **Inhalants** are also downers. They are substances that people sniff for their mood-altering effects. Short-term use results in a user looking and feeling as if they were drunk. Long-term use may result in permanent health problems such as memory loss, brain damage, personality changes, muscular weakness, fatigue, and nerve damage starting in the hands and feet.

Examples: cooking spray, gasoline, kerosene, lighter fluid, antifreeze, paints, model airplane glue, cleaning fluids and nail polish remover

All-arounders

All-arounders have various effects on the body. They can act like both uppers and downers. Hallucinogens and cannabis fall into this category.

- Hallucinogens are drugs used to produce distortion of reality and hallucinations. These drugs are also called illusionogenic or psychedelic. They dramatically affect perception, emotions, and mental processes. They distort the senses and can cause hallucinations. There are currently no accepted medical uses for hallucinogenic drugs.

Examples: LSD (acid, blotter), PCP (angel dust), mescaline or peyote, psilocybin (magic mushrooms)

- Cannabis, commonly referred to as marijuana, is derived from the hemp plant, *Cannabis sativa*. THC is the active ingredient in the cannabis plant. Cannabis is the most widely used of all illegal drugs. It has depressant effects, but, like stimulants, cannabis increases the heart rate.

Examples: marijuana (pot, grass, weed, joint), hashish (hash), hash oil, THC (tetrahydrocannabinol)

- Ecstasy is sometimes classed as an all-arounder because of its hallucinogenic properties.

Drug effects and the individual

The effect of a drug varies from person to person depending on the following:

- Specific drug. Example: Different types of marijuana will have different potencies.
- Amount taken or dose.
- How the drug is taken. Example: Injecting cocaine produces effects more quickly and intensely than smoking it.
- The body. Example: In general a larger person has to drink more alcohol to become drunk than a smaller person does. Also, food a person has eaten will slow down the absorption of alcohol into the blood stream.
- Previous exposure of the body to this and other drugs. Regular users of a drug may require more to produce the desired effect.
- Gender. Example: Women have less of an enzyme called ADH. ADH breaks down alcohol in the body. Usually, women have a higher blood alcohol concentration (BAC) than men after consuming an identical amount of alcohol.
- The setting or location. Example: The physical environment in which the drug is taken can affect the user's experience.
- The user's mental state. Example: A user who is very anxious about a drug experience may be more likely to have a panic reaction than someone who is not.
- Other drugs being used.

Activity

Have the group generate ideas on what their definition of a drug is. Ask questions such as: "What is a drug?", "What does a drug do?" or "What happens when a person uses a drug?" Some of the answers may be: drugs are bad, drugs get you high, people use them for medicine, etc.

One definition of the term “drug” is:

A drug is any non-food substance that changes the way the mind or body works.

Drugs are neither good nor bad; they are simply a substance and it’s the way they are used that has good or bad results. For example, medicines can be used to heal, but they can also make someone sick if not used properly.

Drug classifications

Mood-altering drugs (MADs), also called psychoactive drugs, can affect the way a person thinks, feels, or acts. These drugs usually have physical effects as well, but it is their ability to work on the mind that sets them apart from other drugs. Because they can affect moods, they can be very attractive to some people and at the same time cause problems.

On the board, write the headings for the different mood altering drug classifications. To simplify things, use the terms “Uppers,” “Downers,” and “All-arounders.” Have students list the names of the drugs they know, whether it’s street names or proper names. List them on the board according to their classification. See the back of this page for information on how to classify the drugs.

Give students the handout showing the classifications. As a group or individual assignment, students can research the short and long-term effects of the various groups of drugs. Upon completion, they can present the information to the class.

DEBRIEF

What are drugs used for?

Do drugs affect everyone in the same way?

Why or why not?

Can drugs that are used medically be harmful?

How do the different classes of drugs affect the body?

Drug classifications

Uppers (stimulants)

<i>Nicotine</i>	
<i>Caffeine</i>	
<i>Cocaine</i>	also called C, Coke, Snow, Nose, Candy, Blow
<i>Ecstasy</i>	also called Adam, rave euphoria, X, MDM, M&M, hug drug
<i>Amphetamines</i>	also called speed, ice, crystal, meth

Downers (depressants)

<i>Alcohol</i>	(beer, wine, spirits)
<i>Inhalants</i>	(sniff, huffers)
<i>Narcotics</i>	(codeine, morphine, Demerol®, opium)
<i>Tranquillizers</i>	(Valium®, Librium®, Quaalude®)

All-arounders

<i>Cannabis</i>	(Marijuana; hashish (hash); hash oil (honey oil)—also called pot, grass, reefer, ganja, joint)
<i>Hallucinogens</i>	(LSD, also called acid, blotter)
<i>Psilocybin</i>	also called magic mushrooms, shrooms
<i>PCP</i>	(phencyclidine) also called angel dust, horse tranquillizer